



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**Submitted by
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To the**

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere**

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Chairman Engel, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify, along with my NGO colleagues on "*The Crisis in Haiti: Are We Moving Fast Enough?*" I speak on behalf of President of TransAfrica Forum, Nicole C. Lee, who is unable to participate today. In response to the question "Are We Moving Fast Enough?" TransAfrica Forum's answer in short is a resounding: no.

On January 12, Haiti was hit with a devastating 7.0 magnitude Earthquake. The Quake decimated the capital city of Port-au-Prince as well as countless secondary cities; killing an estimated 300,000 people and internally displacing at least 1.5 million people. It is TransAfrica Forum's assessment that, despite the high level of financial resources already pledged and available, the efficacy of the relief effort has been undermined by structural inefficiencies, bureaucratic inertia, the broad scope of the disaster and vested interested

parties working to preserve privileged while giving the appearance of change. This assessment is the result of six field missions to Haiti including daily consultation with Haitian grassroots and community-based organizations and interviews with camp residents. Our assessments are detailed in our six-month anniversary report, *Haiti Cherie*, which has been submitted for the record. This brief oral statement summarizes the findings of our report.

Unprecedented amounts of money have been raised to address the crisis in Haiti. It has been estimated that enough money has been raised to provide \$37,000 to each family displaced by the Quake.¹ International NGOs and Governments alike have been quick to recognize that a return to pre-Quake Haiti can not be the standard. TransAfrica Forum could not agree more. Unfortunately, it is our estimation that despite extraordinary efforts, the crisis response has replicated flawed models of both emergency response and long-term reconstruction.

The present model of relief and reconstruction has effectively stopped Haitian civil society from taking leadership roles in the rebuilding process. Despite a stated commitment to include Haitian participation, long-embedded prejudices and systems continue to operate. Relief and reconstruction efforts have also taken place overwhelmingly in Haiti's crowded capital, with few resources distributed to other regions where the need is just as great.

¹ Sharyl Attkisson, "Following the Aid Money" *CBS Evening News*. May 12, 2010. July 27, 2010. <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/12/eveningnews/main6477611.shtml>>

Post-Quake Haiti is being framed as an opportunity for further international investment in the poverty-wage industry. TransAfrica Forum's staff has met with textile factory workers who returned to work with no worker protection and wages so low that many are forced to walk home because they cannot afford their transportation costs. Left uncorrected, the failures of this post-crisis period will set the stage for the reconstruction period: national and international corruption, continued human rights violations, wasted resources and, most importantly, continued suffering and loss for the people of Haiti.

Today in Haiti, over six months since the Quake, we have seen little progress. Many residents of Haiti's over 1,300 internally displaced persons camps are living with the same limited security and access to basic goods they found on January 13th. Conditions in IDP Camps remain atrocious. The Haitian camp leadership TransAfrica Forum has met with throughout Port-au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel largely report resources have been limited since the Quake.

The problems faced by people living in IDP camps follow consistent themes including:

- Infrequent food and potable water distribution;
- Insufficient washing and sanitation facilities;
- Inadequate security, particularly for vulnerable populations;
- Minimal job and educational opportunities; and
- Inadequate and unsafe temporary and transitional housing structures.

TransAfrica Forum has been particularly concerned about the impact of these conditions on marginalized populations including women, children, the disabled and the elderly. Haitian Civil Society Organization partners on the ground report that the security situation for women and children continues to deteriorate. KOFIVIV, a Haitian CSO that works on issues of gender based violence, has recorded 242 rapes since the Quake – likely just a fraction of the actual total -- with no prosecutions to date.

Due to inadequate housing, shelter and security, many women find themselves at particular risk while performing daily tasks. In TransAfrica Forum’s interviews with survivors of rape and other forms of gender based violence, many women report being attacked en route to latrines and showers, when traveling to get food and water or simply while being in their tent or shelter alone. Remedial efforts have been made to address the sudden increase of rape including flashlights, whistles and increased foot patrols, but such measures have done little to address the larger problems of insecurity.

IDP communities are also facing immediate concerns of forced eviction. Spontaneous camps throughout Port-au-Prince are frequently based in the neighborhoods people occupied before the Quake; formerly open spaces are now crowded with sheets, tarps, and tents. Many IDP camps are precariously situated due to land degradation and safety issues that necessitate their relocation. IDP camps have also been confronted with private property owners demanding their departure. IDP communities have specific rights within international law outlined by the UN OCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement²

² “OCHA Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” *United Nations*. September 2004. July 27, 2010 <<http://www.idpguidingprinciples.org/>>

which include protection, security, access to basic resources and right to return. To date, the overwhelming majority of Haiti's IDP camps are in gross violation of these Principles.

Allegations of people's interest in staying in camps are both offensive and untrue. Notions that conditions are better than those people had before the Quake or that people are remaining in camps to make money by renting the homes they could occupy are cited as reasons to end assistance to some camps. As I stated earlier, the situation in the vast majority of camps is deplorable: limited shelter, no food distribution, an end to water subsidies, infrequent healthcare, nearly non-existent educational and job opportunities. Time and again, TransAfrica Forum hears the main priority for people is jobs and if people had somewhere else to go, they would.

It is clear that long-term, safe and secure housing options must be built for Haiti's IDPs at a much faster rate. The OCHA Shelter Cluster has proposed the goal of 125,000 transitional (or t) shelters to be completed by next summer³. Even if this goal is reached, it will still only provide more sustainable housing for about one third of Haiti's displaced.

Throughout the rebuilding process we have seen Haitians self-organize and empower themselves to build back better. Not without challenges, the Haitian government has been and continues to be unprepared and simply unable to rise to the task of providing leadership for the country and the international community. Historic mistrust of the Haitian government has translated to a pittance of funds raised going directly to the

³ "Humanitarian Bulletin Issue #6" *OCHA Haiti* July 1, 2010. July 27, 2010 <
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EKIM-87343H-
full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/EKIM-87343H-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)>

government. Such a lack of support by the international community has also been demonstrated by the undermining of organic Haitian grassroots leadership in the community-based camps.

TransAfrica Forum encourages inclusion and leadership by Haitian CSO within the medium- and long-term rebuilding process. To date these challenges have included:

- Exclusion from the United Nations Coordinated Rebuilding Efforts: cluster meetings on the UN log base have excluded Haitians and Haitian CSOs. Meetings are conducted in French and English without Kreyol translation provided. While it is a positive step that meetings are moving off the base, accessibility remains an issue.
- Security Precautions and Zoning System has stopped aid organizations from being as effective as needed. Many international NGOs continue to use security protocols which limit their movement through Port-au-Prince, including measures that stop their ability to interact with and evaluate their own programs fully.
- International organizations, including USAID, have such strenuous and lengthy accounting and auditing requirements that local groups simply do not have the capacity to compete or process the proposal paperwork. Because of this, local Haitian NGOs have received limited funds from international organizations and governments, effectively excluding Haitian CSO.

Changing the model requires reinvention. Such reinvention in the midst of a crisis and its aftermath is not easy. We understand that creating recommendations and principles is easier than their execution, particularly in the midst of continued chaos and emergencies.

Participatory approaches are not easy. But participatory approaches will most effectively include Haitian civil society organizations with a long history in Haiti and commitment to long-term progress.

Expanding structures, like the UN Cluster System, to include engagement by local Haitian experts is not easy. Creating and executing policies that acknowledge the central role of women in Haiti's rebuilding is not easy. But women bear more of the burden during times of crisis and must assume responsibility for families. When Haitian women are empowered as agents of change the results benefit not only women, but society at large. Supporting a vision for new Haiti that is based upon a framework of human security is not easy but it must be done. Such a welcome alteration will mark a departure from previous development models and spur the development of Haitian-led strategies for rebuilding.

In coming months, there are many opportunities to increase the participation of ordinary Haitians. The November 28, 2010 set date for presidential and parliamentary elections, presents an occasion for unprecedented civic participation and voter turn-out. But this requires immediate action to be a fair and inclusive electoral process. Adequate funding and technical assistance, including the creation of National Identification Cards, updated electoral lists, accessible polling stations (throughout Haiti's IDP camps) and extensive voter education is needed. The creation of a new and unbiased CEP (Provisional Electoral Council) to oversee this year's elections followed by pressure on the Haitian Government to establish a permanent electoral council as required by the Constitution must be a priority. In addition, the inclusion of all registered political parties is the only way fair and representative elections can take place. International governments and NGOs must commit

funds and manpower to create such an environment for elections which could give the Haitian government both authority and faculty to effectively manage the country's reconstruction.

Haitian-led policy recommendations, generated by Civil Society Organizations and their partners, exist to support such a change. Investing in sustainable, long-term solutions for Haiti means supporting decentralization. Decentralization is not a lofty goal, but a concrete action plan. Haiti has been highly centralized for centuries, with most commerce, trade, education and jobs being located in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. This has meant Haitians outside of Port-au-Prince have limited access to capital and resources while those in resource-rich urban centers have been subjected to overt government neglect and highly-concentrated poverty. With such high populations and inconsistent building practices, the severe centralization compounded the impact of the Quake.

Moving resources and jobs outside of Port-au-Prince has not been a priority for the aid community. This has meant that many who initially fled the capital following the Quake, have been forced to return because of non-existent resources. In the medium- and long-term development of Haiti we must strengthen regional commerce centers, the development and support of secondary and tertiary roads systems and local and regional food production. In addition, financial centers, politics, educational and employment opportunities outside of Port-au-Prince must be a priority.

Solid suggestions for decentralization exist in the Government of Haiti Action Plan as well as the 2007 Poverty Reduction and Growth Act and the 1987 Constitution. It must be the

role of both the US Government and International NGO allies that holistic infrastructural development, with a focus on decentralization, be prioritized and that pressure be levied to hold the Government of Haiti to this standard. With the goal of Haitian participation and leadership we can work, in collaboration, to truly Build Haiti Back Better.

TransAfrica Forum is the nation's oldest and largest African American foreign policy advocacy organization.